



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 21 January 2008
5397/2/08 REV 2 (Presse 14)
P 009

**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on closure of the regional offices of the British Council in
Russian Federation**

The EU is very concerned at Russia's continued demand to close the regional offices of the British Council in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, and recalls its statement of 21 December 2007 on this issue. The EU deeply regrets in particular the harassment of British Council staff, as well as the administrative and other measures announced by the Russian authorities. These actions are contrary to the spirit of the cultural cooperation Russia agreed to pursue at the first EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council on Culture on 25 October 2007 in Lisbon.

The EU again underlines the valuable and important role that the British Council, as well as all other cultural institutes of EU Member States in Russia, play in fostering cooperation between the Russian Federation and the EU. Cultural institutes form an essential element for the mutual knowledge of peoples and cultures, and should be strongly supported. They are also key to developing EU-Russia cultural relations under the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

P R E S S

The EU urges the Russian Federation to allow the British Council to operate freely and effectively in Russia and to take no further actions that might hinder its activities.

"The Candidate Countries Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process."
